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Report of the Secretary-General on cross-border issues in West Africa

I. Introduction

1. In its presidential statement of 9 August 2006 (S/PRST/2006/38), the Security Council emphasized the regional dimension of peace and security in West Africa and the need to continue coordinating United Nations activities to ensure their improved cohesion and to maximize the use of available resources. The Council stressed the need for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in peace consolidation initiatives and requested that I submit a report on cross-border issues, with recommendations on how to strengthen cooperation among United Nations entities, including peacekeeping missions, deployed in the subregion. The present report, submitted pursuant to that request, examines the new security landscape in West Africa and provides recommendations with a view to addressing West African cross-border issues with increased efficiency.

2. While still fragile, the overall security environment in West Africa continues to improve. Significant progress has been made towards sustainable post-conflict recovery in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and there are encouraging developments in Guinea-Bissau. In Togo, the implementation of the Global Political Accord of 20 August 2006, by which the Inter-Togolese dialogue was concluded, is opening new avenues towards sustainable political reform, improved governance and national reconciliation. In Côte d'Ivoire, direct talks between the parties and the proximity of Burkina Faso, facilitator of the talks, are seen as credible assurance for an acceptable settlement of the conflict. Compared to the situation a few years ago, prospects for durable peace appear far more promising in West Africa. The decline in violence, in both scope and intensity, has led to a reduction in the number of casualties and of other groups victimized by warfare: refugees, internally displaced persons and child soldiers.

3. Progress is also noticeable in the area of democratic governance, as evidenced by the increased number of elected and managed Governments now in place. Constitutional and peaceful alternation of power is increasingly becoming the norm throughout the subregion. While the economic situation remains difficult, it is not hopeless. Although low productivity continues to be a concern in a number of countries, more favourable weather conditions have generated good harvests and increased food security, which was severely jeopardized in 2004 by locust invasions.

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4. New challenges, including certain long-standing issues not properly addressed in the past, are emerging, and may escalate into major threats to regional stability: massive youth unemployment, rural-urban drift, irregular migration, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and human and drug trafficking. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons continues to be of great concern. Overall, human security, while improving, remains fragile.

5. Regional cross-border issues are addressed more effectively in West Africa when there is strong collaboration and coherence among United Nations entities, including peacekeeping operations, and between them and regional organizations. The role of civil society is also vital. Inter-institutional and inter-mission collaboration is increasingly effective in addressing the main cross-border challenges to peace and security. My reports to the Security Council of 12 March 2004 on ways to combat subregional and cross-border problems in West Africa (S/2004/200) and of 2 March 2005 (S/2005/135) on inter-mission cooperation and possible cross-border operations, between the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and my progress report of 11 February 2005 on the implementation of the Council's recommendations on cross-border issues (S/2005/86) confirm this situation. The consolidation of peace in West Africa could focus on three categories of States: one, democratizing States with stable but fragile institutions and large vulnerable populations; two, States with viable institutions and little or no significant abuse of power that need continued external support; and three, States in an extremely volatile situation, with weakened institutions and deepening social and economic crises, which may be subject to civil unrest and insurrectional violence. From this standpoint, Guinea deserves sustained attention and support in strengthening national dialogue and to relaunching the basic conditions for economic growth. A stable Guinea would constitute a good stabilizing factor for all countries of the Mano River basin.

6. Concerning post-conflict recovery, peacebuilding and the strengthening of regional stability, there are three main challenges: to ensure that societies recovering from conflict do not relapse into violence; to make certain that countries not in conflict but exposed to violence from neighbouring States benefit from appropriate support; and that efforts also be focused on stable countries that, nevertheless, have critical needs in long-term peacebuilding, national reconciliation, good governance and support for equitable distribution of national wealth. In that respect, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission has begun its work in supporting countries emerging from conflict, with Sierra Leone being one of the first two countries on its agenda.

7. Globalization is taking root in West Africa. Thanks to easy-to-obtain and cheaper access to information and communication technologies, a large number of West Africans, including those living in remote areas, are better informed, and informed in a more timely manner about national and international events. The world revolution in communications empowers people and generates strong networks between them at national and international levels, including among civil society organizations. The new context inevitably changes the way that issues such as human rights, good governance and the fight against corruption are understood by public opinions and addressed by Governments.

8. Against this background and the important work already under way on the implementation of the recommendations made in my aforementioned reports and concurrent Security Council presidential statements (S/PRST/2004/7 and S/PRST/2005/9), the present report recommends a set of priority actions aimed at consolidating the progress achieved thus far, while strengthening collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

II. Recommendations for addressing cross-border issues

A. Good governance

9. While there is continuing progress in both political and economic governance in West Africa, the overarching challenge of establishing good governance practices in a number of areas, including election processes, economic management and human rights remains. Important reforms are being undertaken on these issues. Although nationally focused, these ongoing reforms, if appropriately implemented, have potential implications for the region, notably through a positive "demonstration effect".

10. The fight against corruption, one of the worst forms of discrimination and exclusion, that leads to conflict and human rights abuses, is critical to the success of reform efforts. Corruption reverses efforts to consolidate good governance and the rule of law. In this regard, the importance of linking civil society, social awareness and education in combating corruption, as well as exposing the pervasive nature of corruption in a number of areas and countries, should be emphasized. When one witnesses soldiers with guns or police extorting money from motorists and market women, one cannot help thinking that the battle against corruption is lost, for while this may look like petty corruption, it erodes and eventually destroys State institutions and credibility, in particular when the population gives up all hope of changing the governance culture. Anti-corruption policies should therefore be a key component of conflict prevention, economic growth and peace and confidence-building strategies.

11. There are a number of important elections taking place in West Africa in 2007: with at least six presidential elections (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone) and nine legislative elections due to take place (Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo). Regularly organized, peaceful and credible elections are an indicator of the consolidation of democracy. However, elections can also breed violence and instability. For that reason, it is important to create an environment conducive to the holding of credible elections. Inflammatory rhetoric, intolerant behaviour, negative mobilization of unemployed youth and abuse of incumbency must be avoided. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance provides useful guidelines for the holding of transparent, free and fair elections. In Sierra Leone, the national Political Parties Registration Commission, with the support of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has developed a code of conduct, including a code monitoring committee to monitor and respond to possible breaches, which has been signed by the major political parties. A code monitoring committee to monitor and respond to possible

breaches. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists has also agreed to and signed a similar code to guide the conduct of the media through the electoral process. A number of training programmes in conflict management and mediation skills for political parties, electoral institutions, security agencies and civil society organizations have been provided. These developments are already making positive contributions to the consolidation of democracy in the country.

12. Many West African societies, especially those emerging from conflict, lack the managerial capacity to run economies properly, although sound economic management is key to both the viability of these States and sustainable peacebuilding. The international community is assisting a number of West African States recovering from conflict to rebuild their national administrative and managerial capacity. Programmes such as the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme in Liberia can help redress the lack of capacity and accountability associated with the absence of proper mechanisms for effective and accountable management.

Recommendations on good governance

1. In fragile countries, such as Guinea, greater cooperative engagement by both ECOWAS and the United Nations is required. ECOWAS and the international community, including development partners, international financial institutions and the private sector with a stake in the country, should combine efforts to support a rapid and peaceful transition from crisis to constructive stability.

2. The United Nations should continue to assist ECOWAS and its member States in their efforts aimed at improving election processes through a more robust regional election-monitoring capacity. Initiatives should be undertaken to deepen civic education and strengthen responsibility and accountability among political parties, including the institutionalization of charters and codes of conduct for political parties in countries where they do not exist.

3. ECOWAS and the international community, including development partners and the private sector in countries with forthcoming elections, should combine and coordinate the various efforts towards the holding of peaceful and credible elections.

4. The ECOWAS Parliament should be further strengthened, including through regular exchange of ideas among regional parliamentarians relating to their oversight functions in efforts to enhance accountability, democratic governance and development of governing institutions. This is vital to effective capacity-building for parliaments and institutional development in post-conflict countries.

5. In order to fight corruption, which is a key source of conflict and human rights violations, and to promote accountability, initiatives on good governance should build on existing accountability and transparency mechanisms, including the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives. Expansion of the donor-funded Improved Accountability and Governance Pact to combat corruption, currently being implemented in Sierra Leone, should be pursued on a regional basis as part of a donor-supported, regionally led and owned programme to enhance best practices in accountability and transparency in public service delivery systems.

B. Security sector reform

13. The security sector remains a major concern in many States of West Africa. The erosion of political authority, the weakening of State institutions and the consequent dereliction of the military and other security institutions are all factors promoting instability. The reform of the security sector is crucial to the success of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. When successfully implemented, such reform provides mechanisms to deal with internal threats to security and contributes to a reduction in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The supremacy of civil service management and oversight of the armed and security forces is a cornerstone of stability and democracy. There should be a common understanding among key actors of what this reform means and what the process entails. Security sector reform should be recognized as a comprehensive process that encompasses good governance, peace, security and development concerns. West African civil society, which is a vibrant element in the region, should be included in security sector reform processes. Because of its role as a watchdog, civil society can have an important function in the reform and management of the security sector.

14. There is a need for an enhanced and more coherent engagement of external actors providing assistance to the security sector reform efforts in West Africa. In cases when multiple actors address the reform, common planning is essential. For example, institutions such as the World Bank and the European Union should consider security sector reform as part of an overall process that encompasses economic development and poverty-reduction strategies. The rebuilding of security forces should be accompanied by a systematic engagement of the internal actors critical to maintaining the reform processes, especially the armed forces, the police and the intelligence services, as well as key oversight institutions, such as parliaments, human rights committees, anti-corruption commissions and civil society.

Recommendations on security sector reform

1. The United Nations and development partners should broaden their definition of and views on security sector reform so that it can be included in larger economic development strategies.

2. The training of armed and security forces in civics, human rights and humanitarian law should be a priority in security sector reform processes.

3. The United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) should undertake broad consultations with Governments, and in particular security institutions, civil society and development partners on gender mainstreaming in security sector reform programmes.

C. Sanctions and embargoes

15. Sanctions and embargoes have proved to be political and diplomatic tools that can be mobilized to induce States and non-State actors to improve and encourage good behaviour. In West Africa, sanctions imposed by individual countries or multilateral institutions, the European Union or the Security Council should aim either at consolidating peace processes or promoting democratization and strengthening good governance. When applied in a timely and pragmatic way,

sanctions can also provide the leverage needed to negotiate and implement peace agreements. It is vital, however, that the consequences of sanctions be taken into consideration, especially when vulnerable populations are the most affected. A key question is when to apply punitive sanctions and when to use incentives. A number of cases in West Africa highlight the importance of the timing of sanctions, notably where those sanctions have been, or continue to be, used to address a democratic deficit (Togo and Guinea), but also in the context of internal conflicts (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire).

16. To be effective, sanctions must be robust and well targeted. This has sometimes been difficult to achieve in West Africa. In certain cases, the consequences of sanctions have been borne by the population at large, rather than by the ruling elites. The implementation of sanctions has also been uneven owing to an insufficiently coherent approach among external actors regarding sanctions application and monitoring. Sanctions need to be seen as part of a wider approach in support of peace, security, sound economic management and respect for the rule of law. The fact that sanctions in West Africa do not cover cross-border activities, although they can have unintended consequences upon such activities, reveals a crucial weakness in the process. Sanctions would be greatly enhanced if accompanied by efforts to strengthen civil society, as well as local actors and institutions, such as parliaments, and communities living along State borders who can serve as watchdogs for effective monitoring.

Recommendations, sanctions and embargoes

1. The active United Nations sanctions committees should continue to provide guidance on the reasons for imposing sanctions and conditions for removal from sanctions lists.

2. The capacity to monitor sanctions should be assessed. A panel to assess what is needed to properly monitor sanctions should be established.

3. Sanctions imposed to further good governance in countries that appear immune to them should be subject to an in-depth review, and, if necessary, alternatives should be pursued.

D. Transitional justice

17. Transitional justice is essential to post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. More and more creative transitional justice mechanisms, combining traditional and international methods, are being established in West Africa, with justice addressed in both judicial and non-judicial terms. Transitional justice mechanisms at work in West Africa include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Liberia and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Transitional justice mechanisms should not limit their mandate to human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity. In this regard, an encouraging innovation is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Liberia, which addresses economic crimes and human rights abuses, while also making recommendations for prosecutions. In terms of transitional justice and national reconciliation, Ghana offers another major innovation. The National Reconciliation Commission in Ghana was established not as a post-conflict mechanism but as a national endeavour to heal the wounds of the past and consolidate peace and reconciliation within the country.

18. The timing and sequencing of transitional justice measures must be considered, especially in post-conflict situations that may be unstable or when peace negotiations are under way. The National Reconciliation Commission in Ghana and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Liberia have produced important reports and held numerous hearings. Weaknesses in follow-up, including the lack of means to implement their recommendations, should be addressed as a matter of urgency in order to ensure realization of the expected results. It is also important, and preferable, that transitional justice processes be tailored to specific local contexts and emerge from traditional systems and local mechanisms for community healing and reconciliation.

Recommendations on transitional justice

1. To strengthen transitional justice, traditional ways of reconciliation should be integrated into peacebuilding processes.

2. UNOWA, together with relevant actors and ECOWAS, should document the ongoing transitional justice experiences in West Africa, as a way of consolidating justice and peace through lessons learned and best practices.

3. United Nations missions should be mandated to facilitate, as appropriate, the implementation of recommendations made during the transitional justice processes.

4. Donors should be encouraged to fund justice systems in the subregion and to support their activities.

E. Humanitarian issues

19. Although the overall humanitarian situation in West Africa has improved in recent years, there are still unacceptable levels of human distress and suffering. Poor governance, food insecurity, forced displacement and the protracted displacement of refugees, floods and epidemics continue to challenge human security. The diversity and transnational nature of these challenges increase their complexity. Their resolution requires strong regional coordination and collaboration among humanitarian agencies, as well as specific outreach to non-humanitarian actors involved in development, conflict resolution and post-conflict activities. The United Nations and the wider humanitarian community active in West Africa have developed a system-wide and coordinated response, including a regional perspective, encompassing cross-border humanitarian issues and highlighting the unmet human security needs that eventually lead to humanitarian crises. The growing engagement and proactive participation of agencies, donors and governmental structures in the regional humanitarian consolidated appeal process for West Africa is worth mentioning. Humanitarian stakeholders have reached a strategic agreement on three priority transnational humanitarian issues that must be addressed in West Africa in the years to come: food security and nutrition in the Sahel; rapid response to health crises; and protection and population movements. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is presently working with ECOWAS to implement and apply the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment in the context of protection of refugees and other persons of concern as well as the local integration

of residual groups of refugees within the subregional and global objective of economic integration and development in West Africa. This initiative also involves addressing the issue of migration and displacement (refugees, internally displaced persons and cross-border movements).

20. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continues to facilitate regional humanitarian coordination using the principles of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee to provide overall policy and technical guidance to ad hoc working groups, United Nations country teams and other non-United Nations partners. Specific attention has been devoted to the development of contingency plans that address national and subregional threats, including avian and human influenza preparedness plans. Consultations and coordination with ECOWAS and the Permanent Interstate Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel continue to be carried out at a strategic level in the areas of crisis management and capacity-building.

21. When addressing humanitarian issues, there is a growing need for better linkage between human security, human development and humanitarian aid in West Africa. In addition to saving lives and addressing human suffering, those carrying out emergency assistance efforts should be aware of and, when appropriate, should address the root causes of such situations, which are often linked to a steady deterioration of livelihoods in rural areas coupled with issues of bad governance. The ability of Member States to respond effectively to disasters depends on their internal response capabilities, both civil and non-civilian, and in their ability to rapidly deploy such response mechanisms in emergencies before external assistance arrives. A crucial component of this internal response capacity is a complement of trained civilian experts, including volunteers, in relevant multidisciplinary fields of humanitarian assistance management, located in situ in Member States and available for rapid deployment, either alone or with security forces and humanitarian agencies, in time of emergency.

22. A key approach in addressing humanitarian issues will be to nurture the spirit of volunteerism, in particular from within civil society at the community level, and to support the development of effective civilian-military cooperation in emergency management. The existence of such capability within Member States will facilitate subregional coordination of emergency response interventions. An important tool for achieving these objectives is the planned ECOWAS Emergency Response Team, which will be a part of civil deployment in emergency and peacekeeping missions. The Team will be used to develop the capabilities of first responders to emergencies (such as the fire, police, military and medical services) at the national level and will also provide the basis for national emergency planning and coordination of the subregional response, particularly in managing cross-border emergencies. Such a policy will result in the further development of the Team and its integration in both the disaster emergency and peace support operations of ECOWAS.

Recommendations on humanitarian issues

1. The United Nations, in collaboration with ECOWAS, Governments, development partners and civil society organizations, should pursue consultations for stronger synergy between short-term responses and long-term efforts in addressing the root causes of vulnerability in West

Africa. Particular attention should be placed on improving food security in the vulnerable Sahel region.

2. Develop subregional disaster response capability, including the ECOWAS Emergency Response Team, as part of the subregional mechanism for disaster management.

3. Coordinate and support review and rehearsal of subregional preparedness and contingency plans for major hazards.

4. The United Nations should encourage the protection of civilians in conflict situations and the strengthening of mechanisms for supporting post-conflict recovery, with a particular focus on fostering the integrated border stabilization strategy being formulated by UNOWA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in collaboration with ECOWAS.

F. Illicit activities and cross-border organized crime

23. The rapid extension of transnational organized crime is of growing concern in West Africa. Such illicit activities and trafficking take many forms, including drug and human trafficking, Internet fraud, smuggling of migrants, smuggling of diamonds and other natural resources, forgery, cigarette smuggling, the illegal manufacture of firearms, trafficking in firearms and armed robbery and the theft and smuggling of crude oil. These activities challenge State authority, especially the capacity of the State to enforce law and order, and can lead to tremendous national tragedies, as witnessed in the recent cases of oil smuggling in Nigeria and the deadly attempts to reach Europe by irregular migrants. Many West African State institutions are greatly weakened by economic crisis and/or civil war, making them susceptible to corruption and lawlessness, which are fertile ground for organized crime. The link between combating illicit activities and reforming the security sector, especially the judiciary and the police, should be given priority.

24. Among the illicit activities observed in West Africa, drug trafficking is increasingly prominent. West Africa is progressively becoming a critical transit point for drugs for the North American and Western European markets, and is vulnerable to developing a significant drug abuse problem of its own. In spite of the difficulty in gathering reliable information on essentially hidden practices, the links between organized criminal activities and the financing of terror should be explored, and the vulnerability of the subregion assessed. It would be appropriate for such work to be undertaken by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as part of its important work in the subregion.

Recommendations on illicit activities and cross-border crime

1. Development partners and international financial institutions should consider the inclusion of a crime prevention and criminal justice component in their development assistance policies.

2. ECOWAS and its member States should assess, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other international partners, the status of crime in the region and should actively participate in the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends, Operations of Criminal

Justice Systems and Crime Prevention Strategies in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/48.

3. ECOWAS and its member States should assess the impact of crime on the victims through the implementation of crime victimization surveys, following international standards and guidelines.

4. With the technical support of the United Nations and other international partners, Governments in West Africa should be assisted in their efforts to strengthen their capacity to enforce law and order.

G. Rapid urbanization, massive youth unemployment and irregular migration

25. The combination of rapid urbanization, population growth and massive youth unemployment continues to represent a great challenge and threat to peace and stability in West Africa. An average of 42 per cent of West Africa's current population of 270 million lives in its cities, which make up less than 10 per cent of the subregion's surface area. This rural-urban drift has not been supported by substantial socio-economic growth and development and job creation. Environmental degradation, low agriculture investment and productivity in the rural areas, in addition to high population growth, continue to be a major concern.

26. Over 60 per cent of West Africa's population is under the age of 30. This represents a large number of young people, the vast majority of whom are jobless. Protracted conflict and bad governance are important factors of economic degradation and consequent massive youth unemployment in the subregion. At the same time, unemployed youth are vulnerable to recruitment by militias, which fuel violence and constitute a major threat to peace and security. For the last 15 years, war has been the main "employer" of the large majority of the youth in West Africa. Incomplete and untimely implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes have exacerbated the issue of endemic and explosive youth unemployment.

27. The explosion of irregular migration is another important consequence of massive and chronic youth unemployment in West Africa. Attracted by the myth of a European "El Dorado", jobless and disaffected young people from the subregion risk their lives daily by embarking on perilous journeys in rudimentary and fragile vessels across the ocean or on foot across the desert. In 2006, more than 31,000 young people left West Africa for Europe. This figure, the highest ever, does not include those who lost their lives or "disappeared" on the high seas or in the desert. Youth unemployment constitutes a particularly serious risk factor in countries emerging from conflict, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. In the case of Sierra Leone, it has been identified as one of the priority areas for the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with the country.

Recommendations on rapid urbanization, massive youth unemployment and irregular migration

1. United Nations agencies and development partners should commit to a further examination of the consequences of rapid rural-urban drift in West Africa and to the development of regional and national strategies to

address the problem, taking into consideration the issue of massive youth unemployment in cities and its high potential for violence, irregular migration and illicit activities.

2. UNOWA should prepare a study on irregular migration with policy recommendations based on a subregional approach on ways to address these issues.

3. UNOWA, in collaboration with other partners (the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UNDP and ECOWAS), should encourage and support West African Governments to focus on employment-generation projects in the rural sector and small- and medium-scale enterprises; UNOWA should prepare a report on urbanization and insecurity in West Africa, with recommendations, as a way to contribute to raising both national and subregional awareness of urbanization and security issues.

4. West African Governments, with the assistance of the international community, should deepen their policies of decentralization, with a view to addressing the challenge of rapidly growing cities and narrowing the current gap between excessively overcrowded big cities and depopulated rural areas.

III. Recommendations on enhancing United Nations inter-institution cooperation

28. Cooperation between United Nations missions in the subregion is continuously being strengthened. It involves the sharing of information and assets, the joint monitoring of cross-border movements and the exchange of lessons learned and best practices. Peace missions in West Africa regularly meet at three levels: at the political level with the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General; at the military level with Force commanders; and at the expert level, with officers in various programmatic areas, including human rights, gender, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform.

29. At the meetings of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General in West Africa, which are chaired by my Special Representative for West Africa, the Special Representatives hold discussions on cross-border issues, with a view to devising the most appropriate regional and integrated approaches to them. At the military level, the Force commanders of the peacekeeping missions, along with the Military Adviser of UNOWA, meet regularly to share information and experiences. Through the coordination and support of the United Nations Joint Mission Analysis Cell, information is shared and investigated promptly, thereby supporting the intelligence service capacities of the States involved. Expert meetings are intended to create cross-border networks in specific areas, including human rights, gender and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and may include colleagues from other agencies and institutions, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNHCR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNDP and the World Bank as well as

representatives of regional organizations, including ECOWAS and the Mano River Union.

30. Cooperation among UNMIL, UNOCI and UNIOSIL has focused mainly on the areas of military operation to consolidate security along the borders of Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. UNMIL and UNOCI have continued to conduct concurrent patrols along the borders between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. There is also joint border patrol activity on the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia, with close cooperation between UNIOSIL, UNMIL and the security forces of Sierra Leone. Concurrent patrols along the borders between Liberia and Guinea are also being undertaken in close cooperation with Guinean security forces. To enhance collaboration through the rapid exchange of information in the various sectors, UNMIL and UNOCI have established inter-mission communication networks, linking adjacent sectors in border areas.

31. Cooperation among United Nations entities in West Africa is not limited to peace missions. The specialized agencies are also actively involved in cross-border collaboration. The United Nations country teams in the Manor River Union countries and in Côte d'Ivoire meet regularly to coordinate their efforts on cross-border challenges facing the countries. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNDP, with support from the Senior United Nations System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza, have established a regional platform for West Africa in Dakar to support and coordinate non-health sector-related actions for pandemic preparedness. This will help to build surveillance and detection capacity, strengthen capability for the rapid implementation of priority actions and ensure effective risk communication. UNICEF and other institutions targeting the use of children in armed conflict have piloted an inter-agency information management system focusing on sensitive border areas in the Mano River Union countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and Côte d'Ivoire. These institutions support the identification of violations of children's rights and programmatic responses provided by agencies, and they are also in the process of developing inter-agency guiding principles on thematic areas such as gender-based violence and minimum responses to the psychosocial needs of children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF and UNHCR, in collaboration with child protection partners, have identified durable solutions for some 350 Sierra Leonean children in Guinea, separated from their families, for whom the family tracing and reunification process has been unsuccessful. The legal status of those children who have opted for local reintegration in Guinea should be addressed by the Government of Guinea, as appropriate. UNICEF and other child protection partners have strengthened their presence along border areas in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire and have established a surveillance mechanism to monitor the movements of children in order to report on and address child rights violations.

32. While strengthening inter-mission and inter-institution cooperation, the United Nations is also deepening its collaboration with regional organizations, especially ECOWAS. Many United Nations entities in West Africa have signed memoranda of understanding with ECOWAS. These documents set forth the principles, conditions and guidelines by which collaboration between the regional organization and the United Nations system can be more effective and mutually inspiring. Likewise, UNOWA and ECOWAS have devised a comprehensive work programme through which they jointly address peace and security issues at the regional and cross-border

levels. It is important that civil society and the private sector be actively involved in the implementation of these agendas.

33. Assistance of a specialized legal nature, such as that provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to the ECOWAS secretariat in the fine-tuning of the Community's new Small Arms Control Convention and the 2001 United Nations Firearms Protocol, in the critical fight against drug trafficking, is most important and should be encouraged. UNESCO brings an important contribution to the deepening of a culture of peace in West Africa, especially by supporting multidisciplinary research, teaching and advocacy in the areas of human rights, gender issues, democracy and facilitating the integration of programmes on education for peace, democracy and human rights in the school curricula of ECOWAS member States.

34. The Mano River basin is currently the most volatile area in West Africa. The issue of cross-border violence and movements of weapons, combatants, drugs and smuggled natural resources is still of great concern in this area. Cooperation among institutions and other various stakeholders in addressing those issues, in a collaborative and integrated way, should be strengthened. Cross-border peace and security issues in the Mano River basin should be addressed within a synergetic and integrated approach. Close collaboration between UNOWA, UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Guinea has brought about the holding of the first subregional conference on cross-border cooperation, security sector reform, confidence-building, peace consolidation and conflict prevention within the Mano River basin. A draft pact on good neighbourhood, stability and solidarity between the States and peoples of the Mano River Union (in which, it has been suggested, Côte d'Ivoire be included) was presented to the conference by Guinea. The draft pact, which will be submitted to the Heads of State of the Union, is an important confidence-building measure that should be rendered effective and operational as soon as possible. Learning from the past, the country team in the Mano River basin (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) have strengthened their cross-border collaboration in order to better address the mutual and intertwined challenges to peace and security, as well as socio-economic development confronting the subregion.

Recommendations on enhancing United Nations inter-institutional cooperation

1. The heads of United Nations peace operations in West Africa should meet regularly to follow up on the implementation of Security Council resolutions and relevant United Nations reports; the role of UNOWA as a mechanism for the facilitation of such meetings should be strengthened.

2. UNOWA should consider organizing a meeting of Security Council representatives in Dakar to help promote closer cooperation in the region.

3. Experts from United Nations peace operations should meet more frequently and systematically to ensure effective follow-up and to strengthen the capacity of the States of the region to address key peace, security and development challenges, including gender issues, human rights, child protection and small arms proliferation.

IV. Recommendations for strengthening the capacity of the Economic Community of West African States: cross-border agenda for peace and security

35. ECOWAS plays an increasingly prominent role in monitoring cross-border issues in the West African subregion. In addition to taking on greater responsibility for cross-border issues, ECOWAS has initiated a series of institutional reforms designed to facilitate deeper regional integration among West African States and to achieve greater effectiveness in cooperatively addressing cross-border issues. A number of new institutions have also been created in the subregion with a view to dealing more efficiently and more effectively with threats and challenges to peace and security, while promoting regional integration and prosperity. It is important to strengthen the capacity of these institutions for their effective functioning.

36. Capacity-building should be extended to the most pressing issue of the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. West African leaders have shown strong political will in combating the spread of these weapons. The transformation of the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons into a legally binding instrument is a concrete manifestation of this political will. The new ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials is an innovative tool that will further contribute to the establishment of a safe and peaceful environment in the subregion. I appeal to the international community, including the arms manufacturers and brokers, to support it, notably in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1467 (2003) on this issue.

Recommendations on the ECOWAS cross-border agenda for peace and security

1. The United Nations should support ECOWAS initiatives aimed at promoting regional cooperation in combating corruption, in particular through the ratification and implementation of relevant legal instruments.

2. ECOWAS member States and relevant subregional institutions should mobilize all national stakeholders and prioritize the allocation of national resources for the implementation of the Programme of Action, 2006-2010, on strengthening the rule of law and criminal justice systems in Africa, endorsed in Abuja in September 2005 and adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2006/21.

3. UNOWA should support ECOWAS initiatives to address common challenges of migration, the promotion of human rights institutions and the development of subregional strategies to better promote and protect human rights.

V. Observations

37. The progress achieved in the areas of peace, security and the rule of law in West Africa is encouraging. Stronger collaboration among United Nations entities in the subregion, including peace and political missions, has strengthened the Organization's capacity to address the challenges we face. Indeed, the resolution of most of the key security issues in West Africa is beyond the capacity or competence

of a single institution. Continuous collaboration, both within and across borders, as well as strategies that prioritize integrated initiatives, are important for efficient action. The regular meetings of the Special Representative of the Secretary-Generals in West Africa have helped identify those key cross-border issues that need to be addressed as priorities.

38. Preventing violence and preserving peace are the primary responsibility of sovereign States. The United Nations and the international community should be supportive of ongoing local efforts. It is therefore encouraging to see that ECOWAS is actively working to reform and adjust its mandate, mission and capacity to the demands and requirements of the evolving West African security environment. Strengthening the capacity of ECOWAS is an important and urgent task, and ongoing collaboration between ECOWAS and UNOWA is essential.

39. Good governance is the crux of viable peace, security and development. In the past, West Africa has suffered tremendously from a deficit of good governance. Now, a number of countries in the subregion have made appreciable progress towards the rule of law. United Nations support for these efforts should be further strengthened. Massive youth unemployment and the subsequent tragedy of able-bodied young men risking their lives in perilous journeys by sea or across the Sahara in the search of better lives call for urgent action. Closely linked to governance issues is the trafficking in natural resources, including diamonds and timber. The growing number of West African States that are part of international mechanisms aiming at transparency in extractive industries is encouraging. Those States that have not yet adhered to these instruments should be encouraged to do so.

40. The reform of the security sector, including the establishment of sound civil-military relations, is key to good governance in the region. The members of the Security Council mission to West Africa of 26 June-5 July 2003 noted in their report (S/2003/688) that "in each country which has been a source of instability in the subregion in recent years the issue of the reform of the security sector is of paramount importance". Security sector reform remains a vital ingredient for sustainable peace in West Africa. The Security Council recently re-emphasized (S/PRST/2007/3) that reforming the security sector in post-conflict environments is critical to the consolidation of peace and stability, promoting poverty reduction, rule of law and good governance extending legitimate state authority and preventing countries from relapsing into conflict. The comparative advantage of the involvement of the United Nations in security sector reform has been most valuable to West African countries emerging from conflict.

41. Security sector reform is a fairly expensive process that requires substantial support from the international community. Endeavours to design a regional comprehensive and coherent strategy in this area are being facilitated by UNOWA. Moreover, I am particularly pleased that the meeting on security sector reform as a tool for conflict prevention, coordinated by UNOWA in partnership with the Government of Guinea and the United Nations country team and held in Conakry on 16 and 17 November 2006, adopted a draft pact on good neighbourhood, stability and solidarity among the States and peoples of the Mano River Union. The pact, when adopted, as recommended by the authorities of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, would strengthen trust and confidence among these countries and allow effective cross-border management of security issues.

42. The keen and continued interest of the Security Council in cross-border issues in West Africa is crucial for the subregion. It is my hope that West Africa will continue to benefit from the Council's indispensable support with a view to further consolidating our achievements in the area of peace and security.